

NATIONAL SINS THE CAUSE OF NATIONAL
SUFFERINGS:

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A

FAST SERMON,

DELIVERED ON

MARCH 8, 1797.

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BY ROBERT MILN, A. M.

FOR MY BRETHREN AND COMPANIONS SAKES, I WILL NOW SAY;
PEACE BE WITHIN THEE:—PS. CXXII. 8.

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N. B. The Author has inserted a few Remarks in the following DISCOURSE, which want of Time prevented him from delivering in Public.

A
FAST SERMON, &c.

ISAIAH ix. 12, 13.

—FOR ALL THIS HIS ANGER IS NOT TURNED AWAY,
BUT HIS HAND IS STRETCHED OUT STILL. FOR
THE PEOPLE TURNETH NOT TO HIM THAT SMITETH
THEM, NEITHER DO THEY SEEK THE LORD OF
HOSTS.

WHEN the Almighty Creator formed this world,
and every thing therein, that he might uphold the
workmanship of his own hands, and preserve, in its different
parts, that order and harmony which he impressed upon
the whole, he erected a kingdom of Providence, and in
it established such laws as bespeak the infinite wisdom,
power, and goodness of their Author. But as man was
the chief of the works of God upon earth, and made
after his image, he gave him laws suited to the dignity of
his nature, and calculated to train him up to those
degrees of happiness and perfection for which he originally
intended him. This is called the moral government of
God, which he exercises over creatures endowed with
reason and understanding; to whom he hath given
capacities for distinguishing between good and evil, and for
choosing the one and avoiding the other. In this imper-
fect state, where we only see darkly, as through a glass,
our views of the divine government are but limited and
narrow, and therefore we are apt to judge partially con-
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cerning it; but, in that part of it which comes within the reach of our observation, we may be fully convinced, from the established order and connection of things, and from the natural consequences of men's actions, that the providence of God is friendly to, and takes part with, the virtuous and good, but denounces misery and punishment to the vicious and immoral. Its invariable language to all who have ears to hear and minds to reflect upon it, is, "*Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.*"—The whole of sacred writing inculcates this momentous truth; for it represents Almighty God as the righteous Governor of the world, who will support the honour and dignity of his laws, and will not permit those who habitually trample upon them to escape with impunity. This is the purport of my text—"For all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts."

These words refer to a part of the history of Ahaz, King of Judah, which you will find recorded, 2 Chron. xxviii. 16.—It seems several of the neighbouring powers had declared war against this prince, and, after invading his kingdom, had made great slaughter of his people. On this emergency, he sent messengers to the King of Assyria, the most powerful monarch of the East, beseeching him to come to his assistance: and that he might the more effectually engage him in his interest, he took all the gold and silver from the temple, and from his treasury, and sent it to him as a bribe. But this king proved a faithless ally; for, after he had received his subsidy, and perhaps expecting no more, he renounced the friendship of Ahaz, and became his enemy: for it is said, 2 Chron. xxviii. 20. "*He distressed him, but strengthened him not.*" The Prophet Isaiah seeing the present and foreseeing the future miseries of his countrymen, and deeply

deeply affected therewith, addresses them in such a manner as was most likely to make a deep impression upon their minds. He mentions many of those vices which prevailed among them, particularly their pride and confidence in their own strength, which had probably brought them into their present alarming situation. And, at the same time, to rouse them to a sense of their danger, he would, doubtless, lay before them the weak and defenceless state of their country. They had been deprived of one of the principal sinews of war, viz. their gold and silver, which their king had sent into a foreign land. They had also lost a great number of those who were best able to defend them: for it is said, 2 Chron. xxviii. 6. that, a little before this, Tekoah, a neighbouring king, had in one day slain twelve hundred thousand of the valiant men of Judah. And, lastly, he informs them, that though they might flatter themselves with the hopes of the great calamities which they had already suffered being a sufficient atonement for their past transgressions, yet this was so far from being the case, that the anger of God was not in the least allayed, but "*his hand was stretched out still*:" alluding to a man who, in a fit of passion, lifts his arm to strike his enemy.

Before I proceed, I shall consider what is the nature of anger among men, and how far allowable; and then shew in what sense this passion is in scripture ascribed to the Supreme Being.

Anger in man is a sudden commotion and uneasy sensation of mind, which excites our aversion to those who we imagine have done or are doing an injury to ourselves, or to others in whose happiness we are interested. This at first breeds animosity and resentment, and, when indulged, becomes a fixed principle of revenge. Anger, and our other passions, are not sinful in themselves, for they were implanted within us by the all-wise Author of our frame, to answer excellent purposes for our security and self-preservation; and to open to us different sources of pleasure,
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the better to enable us to travel on our journey through the rugged paths of human life. Our passions are only the inferior faculties of the soul, and were never intended to lead and direct us, but to be subservient to, and under the government of, the higher and nobler principle of reason. But, though reason and judgment might clearly point out our duty, yet without passions, or, in other words, without motives from pleasure or pain, from hope and fear, to spur us on to action, the higher principles within us would become dormant and inactive, and we would be rendered unfit for answering the purposes of life and being. Moralists have well illustrated this, by comparing man to a ship at sea, where Reason sits as pilot at the helm: the passions they compared to winds, which are necessary to fill the sails, otherwise the vessel would always remain stationary and motionless.—It is said of Elias, James v. 17. “*He was a man subject to like passions as we are;*” and so it may be said of every man, for we are all endowed with one common nature. But then it may be asked, Whence proceeds that difference so visible in the human race in temper of mind and tenor of conduct?—This may be partly owing to difference of original conformation. As in the vegetable world, some plants are easily trained, and, with little culture, grow up to a state of maturity; while others are of such a contexture as to require pains, care, and labour to make them answer the intention of the owner; so, in the great field of human life, we find among children, and, perhaps, of the same parents, as soon as the buds of reason begin to expand, a wide difference in their natural disposition and the strength of their passions. Some are gentle and pliable, and easily tutored in the way of duty; while others are more stubborn and refractory, and require a severer discipline to inure them to a proper and suitable behaviour. But what, in a moral sense, constitutes the great disparity among mankind, is, the management of their sensual desires and appetites. These we bring with us into the world, and of all the other parts of our frame, they have the quickest and most luxuriant growth;

growth. It is one of the greatest misfortunes of human life, that nature puts us under their direction and influence in the early period of our existence; whereas reason and religion, which can only curb these early and unruly appetites, make but a slow progress in the mind, and a considerable time must elapse before they have acquired sufficient strength to counteract the wrong bias which we have already received; besides, not only youth, but every period of life is surrounded with so many temptations on every hand, which have a tendency to inflame and invigorate the passions, so that, to obtain a complete victory over them, is more than what falls to the common lot of humanity. When man is directed by reason and the law of God, he then bears the image of his Maker, and answers the end of his creation; when he is guided by passion, and obeys his sensual appetites, he deranges the workmanship of his Maker, and brings himself to a level with the brute and inferior creation. It was excessive and unlawful desire, or appetite, in our first parents which first introduced sin into the world; and it is the same thing which has ever since maintained its sway among their posterity. For it is worth remarking, that in the whole of sacred writing, and in all the black catalogues of sinners therein delineated, there is not one sin mentioned, against which the wrath of God from Heaven is revealed, but what clearly appears to be owing to the immoderate indulgence of some unruly passion. But he who took us from the dust, and well knows our frame, cast an eye of pity on his frail offspring, and, out of his free grace and mercy, sent into the world his only begotten and well beloved Son to deliver men from the tyranny and domination of their irregular passions; and, by his obedience and suffering, to render it consistent with the honour of his laws and the rectitude of his government, to extend pardon and forgiveness to those who, though not able to yield perfect and unfinning obedience to his laws, yet nevertheless, through the aids of his grace, might arrive at such degrees of holiness as were habitual and sincere, and

and which, on the mild and condescending terms of the gospel, he had promised to accept.

We shall now shew in what sense passion is applied to the Supreme Being. His own Son declares that no man hath either seen or heard the Almighty Father; therefore every notion or idea which we can form of his nature and perfections must be exceedingly obscure and imperfect. For which reason, in all his revelations to mankind he hath condescended to the weakness of their capacities, and allowed himself to be thought of and spoken of after the manner of men; for a revelation can be of use to none but such as understand the language in which it is delivered. But, when joy, grief, love, hatred, anger, revenge, and delight, are ascribed to God in sacred writing, it is only in a highly figurative sense, and by way of analogy or comparison, to make upon our minds deeper and more sensible impressions of the effects of his providence, and the different emanations of that wisdom, power, and goodness, which he manifests in his righteous and equitable government over the inhabitants of the world. With him there is, no variableness nor shadow of turning. In him there is no sudden emotion nor change of mind, but an uninterrupted calmness, like the serenity of the highest Heavens. As the same fire, with one unvaried action, consumes combustible matter, but purifies and refines gold; and, as the sun, with one continued heat, hardens some bodies and softens others; so God, without any change in himself, punishes men when they persevere in their wickedness; but shews mercy to the righteous, and even to sinners, when they truly and sincerely repent. Hence the happiness of good men is, in scripture, imputed to the love and favour of God; while the miseries and sufferings of the wicked are represented as the consequences of his wrath and displeasure.

Had man's abode upon earth been intended by his Maker to be the whole period of his existence, we may
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take for granted, that his happiness or misery would have been exactly proportioned to his character and conduct, whether virtuous or otherwise. But God, in his adorable wisdom and goodness, having determined to train up a part of his creatures, bearing his image, to higher degrees of purity and happiness than they could possibly arrive at in this mixed and imperfect state, saw it fit and expedient, in the constitution of his providence, to permit the righteous to suffer various trials and afflictions in this life, that, by convincing them of the vanity of all earthly enjoyments, their desires might be more steadily and intensely fixed upon the transcendent glories of another world, and their endeavours thereby excited to make a due preparation for the same. Hence, God himself declares, for the comfort of the afflicted, Rev. iii. 19.—*“As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.”*—And the Apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. xi. 32.—*“Therefore, when we are judged, (i. e. when we suffer under the hand of God) we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”*

But, though there appears an unequal and promiscuous distribution of the gifts of providence among individuals in this life; yet it is otherwise with kingdoms and bodies politic: these, as such, have no existence but in the present world; therefore, whatever befalls them, whether good or evil, must take place in this world only. In the next, all these associations are dissolved and totally annihilated. Hereafter, every man will be judged, not as a subject of any particular kingdom, or as a member of any society whatever, but as a single individual, and responsible for his own conduct alone. Adam must answer for the use of his own talents, and so must every one of his children for the use of the talents committed to them; or, in the language of scripture, for the deeds done in their bodies, whether good or bad. But, though large bodies of men, united under the same authority and laws, such as states and kingdoms, can only take place in this life, yet, as they are the greatest and most prominent objects upon earth, they

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fall more immediately under the notice and inspection of that providence which superintends the whole, and directs every remarkable event and revolution, whether great or small, in such a manner as to answer the purposes of the divine wisdom and goodness. Hence, we may conclude, from the justice and equity of his administration, that, if kingdoms and governments have the whole of their rewards and punishments in this life only, these, upon the whole, will be distributed in just weight and measure.—The most remarkable illustration of this truth to be met with in the records of nations, is the history of the ancient Israelites. God erected over that people a government called a Theocracy, because he conducted it both in a civil and religious sense. The laws which he gave unto them were wisely adapted to the gross conceptions of a rude and untutored people; for the sanctions of them were of a temporal nature. Accordingly, when they obeyed their laws, they were a flourishing and happy nation, and enjoyed the blessings of long life, peace, and security; when they transgressed, and became disobedient, they were punished with various and severe judgments. But, as the same God still rules among the kingdoms of men, and invariably exercises his wisdom, power, and goodness, in the administration of his righteous government, the difference between his providence over the Jewish nation, and all others which have appeared, or ever will appear upon earth, is only this,—that, under the former, he displayed his power and authority in a visible, and, for that reason, miraculous and supernatural manner; whereas the same providence over other nations brings about the purposes of his sovereign will and pleasure in a way less obvious to human observation: yet he never leaves himself without a witness of his supremacy; and often, by signal and striking events, calls up a thoughtless world to a sense of a God who holds in his hand the fate of nations, and, when he thinks fit, can humble the pride and power of men, and frustrate their wisest counsels and deepest laid plans.

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There is one thing in the conduct of God's providence over this world, which bespeaks the clemency of his nature, and his regard to the happiness of men. When he determines to inflict a severe judgment upon a guilty nation, or kingdom, as a punishment for their sins, he first gives them many forewarnings of their danger, and allows them time and opportunity to appease his wrath and indignation. For this purpose, he raised up among the posterity of Jacob a succession of prophets, whom he illuminated with his spirit, and vested with sufficient credentials to ascertain their authority and mission. When the people began to degenerate into impiety and vice, and to disregard the ordinary admonitions of his providence, he sent his prophets among them with more alarming messages, who, in an authoritative manner, denounced his wrath against the incorrigible; whilst, at the same time, to those who looked for redemption to Israel, they often proclaimed glad tidings, and carried their views forward to that happy period of peace and joy which was to commence under the reign of their illustrious Messiah. Such a man was the Prophet Isaiah, who, it seems, lived at a time when there was an universal corruption of manners among his countrymen; at least, if we can judge of the lower orders from the character of the higher. It is said in the same chapter with my text, ver. 16.—*"The leaders of this people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed."* And their King, Ahaz, must have been a man of a most obdurate heart, when it is declared of him, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.—*"In the time of his distress, he trespassed yet more against the Lord."* It is a melancholy truth, when affliction does not make men better, it always makes them worse. The longer that Pharaoh and the Egyptians resisted the judgments of the Lord, the more they were hardened, and the more they were plagued. The Prophet Hosea, vii. 9. complains of the Ephraimites, that, though they were brought very low, yet still they continued refractory. *"Strangers (says he) have devoured their strength, yet they return not to the Lord, nor seek him*

"for all this." And the Prophet Isaiah says—"The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, and they shall devour Israel with open mouth: For all this anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. For the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts."—There is a peculiar propriety and emphasis in the character which is here given of the Almighty, viz. "the Lord of Hosts," or of armies. This is intended by the prophet to remind the people that it was in vain for them to place their confidence in the arm of flesh, or in human aid, for in this they had been deceived, and might be so again; but it was both their duty and their interest to seek the favour of that Being who was strong and mighty in battle, and who can inspire the weak with courage, and the strong with faintheartedness, so that "a hundred should chase a thousand, and a thousand put ten thousand to flight." A pious king long ago observed, "It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." Pl. cviii. 9.—And a wise man says, Prov. xxi. 31.—"The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is only of the Lord."

I shall now make some improvement of the above subject suitable to the solemnity of this day.—And may I not appeal to all who hear me, whether the language of my text is not, at the present conjuncture, very applicable to the inhabitants of this island, and whether it is not worthy of their most serious attention? We have already felt the anger of the Almighty, and we cannot but see that "his hand is stretched out still;" the effects of which are of such an alarming nature, that the highest authority of the land has appointed this day to be observed as a fast throughout the whole of this kingdom. But for what end and purpose? Is it to abstain from food, and resist the usual calls of nature? Or is it, in the words of the Prophet Is. lviii. 3.—"For a man to afflict his soul—and bow down his head like a bulrush?" Or, as the same writer expresses it,—"Is it to fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness?" Will any or

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all of these appease the wrath of an angry God, and draw down his blessings upon our guilty heads? If such an appointment have any meaning, and is intended to answer any good end, it must surely be to bring to our remembrance the many heinous sins which prevail among us, and to excite us to that repentance which consists in ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. That all-bountiful Being, whose chief glory consists in the happiness of his creatures, makes use of different means to draw men from the evil of their ways, and bring them to a sense of their duty and danger. To a nation, the most common and ordinary are his mercies and his judgments. The first, viz. his mercy, is most congruous to the benignity of his nature; and, at the same time, the most efficacious to reclaim those who are not lost to the feelings of gratitude and ingenuity of mind. And, may it not be said, with great truth, that the nation to which we belong has, by the bountiful providence of God, been distinguished from almost every other upon earth, by the many peculiar blessings bestowed upon it, both of a temporal and spiritual nature; so that this island may be called a happy land, watered with the dew of heaven? One of the prime blessings of life is LIBERTY; i. e. the free and reasonable exercise of all those gifts which we have received from our Maker, such as reason, judgment, and conscience, of which he is the sole Lord and supreme Judge; the enjoyment of our health and life, which were committed to our trust, and which we cannot voluntarily resign into the hands of another without acting contrary to the will and pleasure of that Being who gave us them; and the lawful and peaceable possession of our property and the fruits of our labour, which, strictly speaking, are our own, next to the members of our body. To be unjustly or unreasonably deprived of any of these is cruelty, tyranny, and oppression. Our forefathers brought with them a spirit of liberty from the woods of Germany, and their children have made many a noble struggle to preserve this inestimable jewel: for it numbers of them have bled, and numbers of them have died. And, though
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many attacks have been made upon the constitutional liberties of this realm, and they have been severely wounded by enemies the most dangerous, because the most insidious and deceitful, ye there is still found among us "*a remnant who have not yet bowed the knee to Baal,*" and who stand forth in defence of their country and its unalienable rights. These may be called the Sons of Peace; for, from the beginning of it, they have foreseen the ruinous consequences of the present cruel and bloody war, and developed all the intricate and involved measures by which it has been conducted. They have warned their country of its danger, and pointed out the most effectual means of averting it. And this they have done with an energy of reason which nothing could resist, but the most inveterate and interested prejudices: and, that their arguments might make the deeper impression, they frequently cloathed them with an eloquence equal to that of the most celebrated orators of Greece or Rome. But, of all the blessings which indulgent Heaven has conferred upon us, the greatest and most invaluable is the gospel of Christ. Soon after he left the world, the light of the Sun of Righteousness penetrated into this region of darkness, and ever since his beams have continued to shine among us with accumulating splendour. And, when gross and lowering clouds of popish idolatry and superstition had for many centuries darkened the face of all Europe, at the auspicious era of the reformation, we were among the first whom the Day-spring from on high visited; and who received the free use of the sacred oracles in their original purity. True it is, that the religion of Christ, ever since it was taken into alliance and blended with the kingdoms of this world, has been, and still continues to be, held in fetters and chains, fabricated by human authority and craft, to drag it into the service of political power; yet, to counteract this, we have one privilege which remains unassailed, I mean the liberty of consulting our Bible, and, when our hearts incline us, of sitting at the feet of our great and divine Teacher, and learning from his mouth those truths which can alone make us

wife unto salvation. It is to be regreted, that many corruptions have been mixed with, and substituted for, the doctrines of life and goodness, as laid down in the gospel; yet, to prevent the fatal effects of these, God is very frequently sending some able labourers into his vineyard, who, like honest and faithful servants, take the fan into their hand to purge the floor, and separate the sound grain from those tares which, when sown by the hand of Ignorance and Prejudice, never fail to produce a luxuriant crop of useless and unedifying disputes, fomented by animosity, strife, and contention. But, were I to enumerate the mercies of Almighty God to this nation, and the great and signal deliverance which his providence has wrought for its safety and protection, time would fail me, and I should be at a loss where to end. What enhances the greatness of the whole, is the ungrateful returns we have made to so much goodness. Need we then be surpris'd that at last his anger should be kindled against us, and that he should use severer methods to cure us of our vices.

The divine judgments are at present gone abroad into the world, and not only the cup of this, but of other nations seems to be fast filling up; though in the mean time we are compelled to drink some of its bitterest ingredients. The Prophet Ezekiel, xiv. 21. says that God had four sore judgments wherewith he chastised his peculiar people, the sword, the famine, noisome beasts and the pestilence. But, of all the four, the forest and most fatal to the human race, is the sword, because it is forged by themselves, and, contrary to the express command of God, drawn for the destruction of their fellow creatures. Among all the crimes that can be charged to the corruption of human nature, the most atrocious, and at the same time the most unnatural, is WAR,—more especially when unjust and unnecessary. Let us figure to ourselves the inhabitant of some planet, where the voice of Strife and Discord was never heard, permitted to visit the enlightened part of our globe, in order to learn the character
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of its inhabitants; as soon as he saw a human being, he would be struck with that apparent dignity which seemed to raise him above every other creature beside; and, wishing to be better informed concerning him, he would endeavour to have one of the best and wisest of the species to be his instructor. After finding such a person, he would learn from him, that man was formed after the image of his Maker, and endowed with a higher principle of reason to direct the inferior faculties of his soul; that he was also made with a social disposition, and had a principle of benevolence implanted in him, which prompted him to wish well, and contribute to the happiness of his fellow creatures; the indulging of which principle afforded him the most refined pleasure which he could possibly enjoy in his present state. He would tell him, that the character of that great Being who made man, and was the object of his worship, was the God of love, who had given to every one a commandment to love his neighbour as himself. And, farther, that that Saviour, whose disciple he and those whom he saw avouched themselves to be, came on purpose into the world to proclaim peace on earth and good-will towards men, and had given it as a badge to his followers, that they should have love to one another. And, lastly, he would acquaint him that all men were brethren by nature, and sprung from one common stock; that they were all members of one great family, and children of the same all-bountiful Parent. Now, suppose his guide carried the stranger within view of two armies just engaging in a fierce and bloody battle, how would he be surprised when he heard and saw the messengers of Death flying thick on every side; beheld the bodies of men mangled and torn, and their blood running in streams upon the ground, and at the same time heard the dying and doleful groans of the wounded; till at last he saw, perhaps, some thousands lying in promiscuous heaps, ghastly, pale, and breathless. In the greatest consternation, he would accost his guide, and tell him, that, if their Creator had ever given these men reason, he had for a season deprived them of it, and, in

its stead; inspired them with a fit of phrenzy and madness. But he would anxiously enquire what great injuries the one side had received from the other, that nothing less than the blood of their antagonists would satiate their resentment. He would be informed, that not one of a thousand on either side had done the smallest injury to, or received one from, any in the opposition; but that the whole of this catastrophe was owing to the pride and ambition of a few individuals, who were neither better nor wiser than others beneath them, but who sacrificed numbers of their fellow creatures to increase their power and domination, though they had already more of both than they could make a proper use of. Then the stranger, sorrowful to think that there should be such inconsistent beings in the empire of the great and good Jehovah, tells his teacher that he regreted his condition in being confined to such a turbulent world; and, bidding him farewell, wings his way to that peaceable, and of consequence happy region from whence he came.

War not only produces direful effects in the bloody field, but draws after it a large train of rueful consequences,—of which, I am sorry to say, we have at this time too many affecting proofs among ourselves. There is no occasion to exaggerate these; they are more sensibly felt than words can describe them. Since the commencement of our present *unhappy* contest with a neighbouring kingdom, how many mournful sighs have been heaved, and what floods of tears have been shed by the fatherless, the widow, and the orphan, in lamenting what they can never more recover—the loss of their dearest comforts on earth, by the untimely deaths of fathers, husbands, children, and relations! Of these, many, through necessity, or force, have been obliged to leave their native soil, and be reluctantly carried to far distant and inhospitable climes, where, if they happened to escape the sword of the enemy, they fell a sacrifice to a most deadly and pestilential malady.—A kind Providence has hitherto saved us from a real famine, which is an usual concomi-

tant of war ; yet many are groaning under the difficulties of life, and, with all their care and industry, can scarcely provide subsistence for themselves, their families, and dependants.

There is nothing more alarming to a commercial nation than its credit being in the least impeached, or impaired : this is most likely to take place after a long, expensive, and unfortunate war. When a country is drained of its wealth and riches, it becomes like a plant deprived of its natural sap. Its leaves may for a time retain their wonted appearance ; but, as the source of its health and life begins to be dried up, the malady will shew itself in the whole of its constituent parts, till at last it will wither, sicken, and die. The present war has occasioned such an enormous drain of our national wealth, that its effects begin now to be sensibly felt, and attended with very disagreeable circumstances. It seems that the principal spring in the great machine of our government is at present considerably deranged ; which gives the greater alarm, as it is this which keeps in motion the wheel which draws from the great storehouse of national treasure such portions thereof, and conveys them through all the channels of the commercial system, as are necessary for its support and preservation.

In all parts of the world, where precious metals have been introduced as an equivalent for the articles of life, they have been considered as having an intrinsic value peculiar to themselves, for two reasons : their circulation in moderate sums is easy ; and, by a tacit and general consent, with no great variation of their value, they pass current among all nations who have mutual intercourse with others. Besides they have a greater permanency, and are proof against accidents, more than most things. Doubtless, credit may be substituted for coin, and, for a time, be better accommodated to the different purposes of trade ; yet, as it is nothing but a creature purely ideal, and depending solely upon opinion, it has always been con-
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sidered as having no certain permanency, but, like every other human device, or contrivance, liable to the vicissitudes of fortune. The credit of a kingdom and of an individual are strictly analogous. So long as each can answer those demands to which they have subjected themselves, and for which they are responsible in justice and equity, their credit stands firm; but, when it is otherwise, and the demands of claimants are evaded by subterfuges, or substitutes offered them, which they are not willing to accept, then immediately the credit of each begins to totter, like a wall undermined at the foundation, which, if not timeously propped, will soon tumble down, and become a ruin.—The deficiency of gold and silver in this island, is the reason why, at this time, many honest and industrious tradesmen are obliged to forego what is almost as dear to them as their life—their credit and reputation; and why so many of the most laborious, and consequently the most useful part of society, are, for want of employment, cast upon the world in a destitute and forlorn condition.

Our Saviour, Luke xiv. 28. 31. makes use of two proverbial expressions very pertinent to this subject—“*Which of you (says he) intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have wherewith to finish it?*”—Whether the promoters of this war counted the cost before they began it, I cannot say; but I believe none will contradict me when I say, a *costly* war it has been; far more so than any other recorded in the annals of Europe. Of this truth we have all a *sensible* feeling, and are compelled to pay our different portions of the cost, which, to many, is a very heavy burden, and more than they are well able to bear. If this comparison be pertinent, it naturally suggests the following question, Whether a wise man would build a house without a view either to his convenience or profit? But, sure I am, this nation has yet enjoyed no advantage from the present war, excepting the planners of it, and those whom they employ in conducting it. It is extremely hard upon
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those who bear the whole expence of rearing an edifice, when, instead of reaping benefit from, they are very severe sufferers by it. As for our Saviour's question, Whether a man, before beginning a tower, ought to consider whether he have wherewith to finish it? the answer is obvious, namely, that every prudent man would take this into consideration; more especially if the work is of an arduous nature, and difficult to be accomplished.—Now, as war is an object of the greatest magnitude, and involves in it not only the fates of individuals, but even of nations, it ought not to be undertaken, but after the coolest and most serious deliberation. No doubt our ruling powers, at the commencement of the present war, hoped to finish it successfully long ere now; but it is a notorious truth, that their calculations have failed them, so that they cannot be looked upon as MASTER-BUILDERS. Our Saviour, in the above cited passage, introduces another proverbial expression still more apposite to the subject in hand, and says—“*Or what king going to war—sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether with ten thousand he can meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?*”——Those with whom we contend are a powerful people, and far more in number than we are; yet, by continuing the war, it would seem that we flatter ourselves with the hopes of overcoming them. But on what foundation do we build our expectations? If on our own strength, and the assistance we purchase from our allies, this has been already tried, and very great efforts have been made, yet our adversaries still look us in the face. Others trust to Providence, and think that, because we are a more virtuous and religious people, the righteous Governor of the world must be our friend, and enable us at last to crush our enemies, as a just judgment for their heinous crimes. By harbouring such an opinion, I am afraid we too much resemble the Pharisees of old, “*who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*” The ways of Providence are always just and equitable; but our views of it are so limited and narrow, that we are not competent judges of the methods

of its procedure. God spares wicked nations, not only to shew his mercy and lenity in giving them time to repent and amend, but likewise to make them a rod in his hand for chastising others; then, when they have served the purposes of his sovereign will and pleasure, he punishes them for their cruelties, by instruments of the same nature which they themselves made use of. This truth is well verified in the history of the children of Israel. He frequently stirred up against them their idolatrous neighbours, such as the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and Babylonians; yet at last he sent his prophets to denounce the most awful judgments against them, which he executed accordingly. The guilt of a nation may appear in the eye of the Almighty different from what it does to human observation. He does not see as man sees, nor judge according to the opinion of men. Guilt cannot be estimated by the mere commission of criminal acts. It is either aggravated, or extenuated, in proportion to the advantages which one part of mankind enjoys above another. Thus our Saviour, speaking of Capernaum and Bethsaida, which had heard his doctrine and seen his miracles, says—“*It shall be more terrible for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for these cities.*”—Ingratitude is considered by men a sin of the deepest die, and, doubtless, it is so by the righteous Judge of all; therefore, when a nation has been distinguished by the love and favour of Almighty God, in bestowing upon them temporal and spiritual blessings above others, yet they have all along abused those blessings, and perverted them to the gratifications of avarice, sensuality, and vice; in that case, justice itself may call for a temporal scourge on such people, in preference to those who have been born in a region of darkness, and educated in gross ignorance and superstition. I readily allow that our enemies are a sinful people, and have perpetrated such cruel and atrocious crimes as every good man must execrate and abhor; yet, nevertheless, Providence has visibly favoured many of their undertakings, and has hitherto granted them

them unexpected success. This suggests to some the following reflection :

It appears from the history of past ages, that the greatest calamities which ever befel the human race, however terrible they might be to those who were involved in them, yet, by the all-disposing Providence of God, they were so overruled, as to produce the happiest and most salutary consequences to succeeding generations. And it is highly probable that this may be the result of all those scenes of misery and war wherewith the Christian world is at present so grievously afflicted : yea, our enemies, bad as they are, have already done some things which may redound to the benefit of many millions yet unborn, (an object highly pleasing to that God whose greatest glory consists in the happiness of his creatures) and for which, it is probable, Providence has hitherto supported them. As far as their power extends, they have abolished slavery, and raised a great part of mankind from the most abject state of human degradation, to their proper rank in the scale of rational beings :—an event at which Humanity must be pleased, and Benevolence itself rejoice. In their own kingdom, which for many ages has been the seat of persecution, priestcraft, and superstition, and where the blood of many thousands of the best of God's servants has been spilt, they have broken the chains wherewith they had been long cramped, and granted an unlimited liberty of conscience to every man to worship the common Father of all according to the dictates of his own heart. —Perhaps that Being, whose purposes no power in heaven or earth can withstand, hath made a decree, that neither civil nor religious tyranny shall ever henceforth be established in that great empire. And, farther, whatever may be the intention of these people in their different plans of government, they have done another thing which looks favourable to posterity : they have allowed every state they have conquered to erect such constitutions, and make such laws for themselves, as they judge most

most conducive to their peace, liberty, and prosperity.— When or how the ruinous and bloody war in which we are now engaged may come to an end, God alone knows; but many wise and good men are of opinion, that the present “*shaking of the nations*,” and the commotions throughout the Christian world, attended with such singular and almost miraculous events of Providence, portend some great revolution,—and perhaps not so distant as we are apt to imagine. I pray to God, that the whole may terminate in the extension of civil and religious liberty, and in the establishment of peace, truth, and righteousness among men.

It is usual, on such a day as this, to enumerate the various sins of the land; but here I know not where to begin, nor where to end; for, I am sorry to say with the prophet, “*The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint*.” There seems to be such an universal corruption and depravity of manners, that nothing less than a general reformation of principles and practices can save this kingdom from ruin. When any malady has seized upon the body, and tainted the whole of its constituent parts, topical or partial applications can never effect a cure, but only such powerful medicines as pervade the whole frame, and restore soundness to the different springs of life. But such a renovation of the political body can only, under Providence, be brought about by its rulers enacting just, moderate, and equitable laws, calculated to restrain vice and immorality, and to promote peace, harmony, and mutual confidence among all ranks of people, in which the strength and security of every nation doth consist. Though this is to be fervently wished and devoutly prayed for, yet it is hardly to be expected, while so many and so deeply rooted vices prevail among us, which have hitherto proved the bane of society, and will always prove fatal to the interests and happiness of every kingdom upon earth. Of these I shall mention some of the most prominent.

Infidelity

Infidelity and irreligion seem to be gaining ground in this kingdom, and to taint the minds of many who value themselves upon their freedom of thinking and reasoning upon subjects of a religious nature; who, having found some of those principles in which they were educated, and in whose favour they had been for a long time prepossessed, to be false, instead of resting there, draw this unjust and partial inference, that the whole of religion is imposture and deceit. Thus, by indulging a wavering and sceptical disposition, they at last imbibe opinions which, to say the least, border upon atheism itself. Several learned men, both at home and abroad, in this age, have adopted what is called the *mechanical system*, in which a God is totally overlooked. They believe that the world is eternal, and revive the exploded doctrine of fate. They deny a Providence, and suppose that whatever comes to pass is nothing but the effects of certain causes, which arise from, and are invariably directed by, what they call the constitution or laws of nature. To disprove such an impious system with arguments of a philosophical nature, would be needless on my part, especially before an audience which, I flatter myself, believes that there is a God who formed the world by his power, and upholds it by his Providence. I shall only mention one argument, because it is plain and obvious and at the same time very convincing. Suppose you saw hanging down from Heaven a chain of a vast length, and consisting of innumerable links, each of which was supported by and did support another, would it not naturally occur to you that there was something at the top on which the weight of the whole chain was suspended? It would be frivolous to say, the reason why the chain did not fall down to the ground was owing to the links mutually supporting each other, when common sense would tell you that the whole weight lay upon the uppermost link, which, for that reason, must have in itself strength and security sufficient for what it has to sustain. Now this last is nothing but God himself, who is the first and great Cause of all; to whom all other causes and effects

effects ultimately belong, and on whose Providence alone they do depend.

An apostle of Christ says—*"In the last days scoffers shall arise, walking after their own lusts."*—This plainly intimates the near connection between infidelity and immorality:—a remark too well justified in experience. It is natural for a man who lives without God in the world, to wish there was no such Being to whom he was accountable. And it is no wonder that they should discredit religious principles; who are destitute of them in their own life and conversation. It cannot be denied that revelation has been often wounded under a false and fictitious garb. Many doctrines have been imputed to it, which it expressly disclaims, as contrary to its spirit and general scope; and which have no other foundation than the heated imagination of bewildered enthusiasts, or the empty comments of weak, superstitious, and designing men. We are informed, 1 Cor. iii. 12. that under the very eye of the apostles men began to build upon the foundation of Christ wood and hay and stubble. Since that time, what numerous corruptions have arisen in the church of Christ, and tainted the purity of his gospel; so that it may be said, *"How is the gold changed, and the most fine gold become dim?"*—Now, several writers, and some of them of no mean talents, perceiving the absurdity of many doctrines which were incorporated into the Christian system, and generally looked upon as essential parts of it, conceived a prejudice against the whole; and, in order to overturn it, attacked it with reason and argument, the best touchstone of truth. But, instead of an injury, they did it an essential service; for they purged it of many errors, by clearly exposing them, and obliged its true and genuine friends to resign to its enemies what they found was not tenable, but had only served to bring a discredit upon the whole. Owing to this, the Christian religion, when freed from its unsound parts, acquired new degrees of strength and vigour, and the believer, in the words of an apostle, 1 Pet. iii. 15. was
"always"

"always ready (and able) to give an answer to every man that asked him a reason of the hope that was in him."—Reason and revelation proceed from the same fountain, and they are both equally the workmanship of the same omnipotent and all-perfect Being; therefore the one can never contradict or supersede the other, for they mutually support one another. What benefit could we reap from revelation without reason? and what knowledge could unassisted reason of itself give us? None, but what we draw from such objects as come within the cognizance of our senses.

From what falls within our observation, we are led to conclude, that the Almighty Creator executes the purposes of his sovereign will and pleasure throughout the whole natural world by the instrumentality of means.—Hence, by analogy, we are led to conclude, that it is the same in the moral or religious world. Revelation puts this beyond all doubt; for every precept, every exhortation, which it contains, either supposes or expressly recommends the use of means on our part. When we are told, *Phillip. ii. 12.* that *"God works in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure, we are at the same time exhorted to work out the work of our salvation with fear and trembling:"* but of all the means prescribed by infinite Wisdom for our improvement in piety and virtue, that which has the most powerful and natural tendency for producing this happy effect, is the setting a part one day in seven for the purposes of devotion. This, among Christians, is called the *Lord's-day*, because upon it our Saviour rose from the dead, and, by this memorable event, established the faith, and confirmed the hopes of those who truly believe in him. Laws sanctioned with divine and human authority appoint that day to be kept as a day of *rest*. This affords Christians time and opportunity of assembling together, and, in a public and solemn manner, paying their dutious homage to the common Lord and Father of all; while, at the same time, they have the advantage of hearing the doctrines of life and
godliness

godliness explained and recommended to their practice, from the most affecting considerations; such as the unbounded love of God to mankind, and the meritorious obedience of his own Son, who laid down his life for us, that we, through him, might live again, and enter into a state of endless glory and felicity. Nothing therefore can be devised so likely to convey into our minds deep and abiding impressions of a God, and of the duties which we owe to him, to ourselves, and to others, as a regular attendance upon public worship. This, when performed with real sincerity and devotion, is, like other parts of genuine piety, profitable for the present as well as for a future life. The example of a man, whose conduct bespeaks him a servant of God and faithful disciple of Jesus, is not only useful to the world, but procures him the esteem and confidence of the serious and good. While he is in the house of God, a sense of the divine presence must overawe his mind, and, when he leaves it, such useful influences of divine grace will accompany him, as in his future conduct guard him against those snares into which the impious and profligate fall, to their own hurt and ruin. And, farther, the conscientiously pious and devout man, enjoys a nobler reward than the world can confer upon him, the peace of his own mind, and "*the blessing of God, which passeth all understanding.*" Yet, notwithstanding, it must be owned that there is scarcely a kingdom called after the name of Christ, where the Lord's-day is more grossly prophaned, and prostituted to the purposes of vice, vanity, and sensuality, and where the worship of God is more neglected and contemned, than in this to which we belong. I shall make no other reflection upon this ingrateful truth, than that the increase of impiety and irreligion among a people is ominous with respect to their worldly prosperity: God himself declares, 1 Sam. ii. 30.—"*Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*"—We live in an age which, in many respects, may be called more enlightened than any which has preceded it. But light, when abused, is worse than darkness, because it

enables the vicious to do more mischief than could have been done without it. Accordingly we find that human knowledge, instead of teaching men the limited nature of their capacities, and the small extent of their understanding, serves rather to puff them up with pride and self-conceit, as if their own reason were of itself a sufficient rule of life to them.—In this island, many exercise their learning to discredit and undermine the whole of sacred writing. Among writers of this character, the light of reason and dictates of conscience are greatly extolled, and by that means natural religion is attempted to be raised on the ruins of revealed. But a plain and obvious question occurs—What code or writing shall we consult so as to satisfy ourselves that we have found a true and perfect digest of the laws of reason and natural religion?—If we go in quest of these through the different kingdoms of the world, we will find as great a difference in their religion and morals as in their complexion and modes of life. If ever the efforts of reason and genius could have investigated and delineated a perfect system of the laws of nature, reason, and religion, it must have been at Athens and Rome, among sages renowned for their wisdom, sagacity, and penetration: yet it is an undeniable fact, that their schools of reason and philosophy were as deeply involved in superstition and idolatry as other parts of the world. Therefore, I conclude that the laws of nature, or, in other words, the moral and eternal laws of justice, truth, and righteousness, are to be found no where else but in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which, in mercy to a dark and benighted world, was given to it by the God of nature, from whom every good and perfect gift doth descend. As for conscience, what is it? Nothing but our own judgment concerning the merit or demerit of our actions. Now, our judgments of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, are not always founded in truth: they are generally formed from various and different motives; such as our education, the civil and religious principles we have imbibed, the company with which we associate, the books we read, and many other accidental circumstances,

stances. Hence it appears that a man's conscience cannot be a sure guide of his conduct; for, though he may be deemed honest while he follows the light of it, yet, as his judgment may err and be false, this very light may lead him in the way of great and heinous crimes.

We have likewise heard of the commencement of an *age of reason*; but, as every tree is known by its fruit, let us at present cast our eye over the Christian world, and judge of the effects of this highly improved reason. If we begin at the courts of the great, there we find bribery and corruption, joined in league with falsehood, fraud, and dissimulation.—Among the subjects of enlightened kingdoms, what numbers are imbruing their hands in the blood of one another, and dealing in rapine and plunder! In short, we find vice flourishing as much as ever.—If such be an age of reason, I pray it may soon come to an end, and another and a better succeed.—There is one vice which pervades the whole of this nation, and may be truly called epidemical; I mean a selfish and interested spirit. From the king on the throne, to the beggar on the dunghill, the language of most men is, who, or what, will procure them any personal advantage. Patriotism, or public spirit, has become a name without a meaning. Formerly our fathers voluntarily risked their lives and fortunes for the sake of their country; now, if their children do so, it is only for the sake of present gain and future prospects.—There is another evil which may be properly called national, and produces consequences of a very malignant nature,—a factious and party spirit. When this is inflamed by religious or political zeal, it intoxicates men, and renders them so ungovernable as to break over the bounds of friendship, justice, equity, and humanity. This is a spirit dangerous to and unbecoming a true Christian,—but, of all men, the most unbecoming the preachers of the gospel of Christ. It is their province, in imitation of their great Lord and Master, and in obedience to his commands, to recommend mutual love and charity, in the unity of the Spirit

spirit and the bond of peace; but nothing can more effectually degrade the character of those who labour in the vineyard of Christ, than to see them converted into the votaries of political power, sounding the alarm of war, cherishing the seeds, fanning the fire of civil discord, and exasperating different parties already too much exasperated against one another.—Worldly comforts and preferments may be desirable things, but these are purchased at far too great an expence by a professed follower of Christ, when he exchanges for them that badge of love which his Lord and Master gave him constantly to wear, as his ornament and distinguishing mark. I may further remark, that the prevalence of a party spirit prefaces no good to any country; our Saviour observes, Matt. xii. 25.—“*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.*”—Among other national vices, many reckon pride and luxury. The wise man observes, Prov. xvi. 18.—“*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*”—As for luxury (which is rather an indefinite term), it does not so much consist in the enjoyment of the good things of this life, which God hath created to be received with thankfulness, as in the wasteful abuse of them to vicious purposes; when persons, prompted by pride and vanity, live in such an extravagant manner as to exceed their income; or in such a stile as is unsuitable to their character and condition in life. If a spirit of this kind affects the higher and ruling powers of a kingdom, in order to gratify their own demands, and those of others with whom they are immediately connected, they extort from the lower classes of people the fruits of their labour and industry, that they may fatten upon their spoils. This generates oppression, which may be born for a considerable time; but when the load increases, and becomes heavier than human strength can bear, it must at last be entirely thrown off.—The last vice which I shall mention as too common in this kingdom, and for which it is branded even among foreigners, is cursing, swearing, and blaspheming the name of

of God in ordinary conversation. Of all sins which men commit, they have the least temptation to this; unless it may be called a temptation to be ashamed to be thought that they fear God, and are afraid of trampling upon his great and tremendous name. We think it no cruelty to bind a madman with chains and fetters; to prevent him from doing mischief to himself and others; as little can it be considered a constraint upon liberty to bind men by laws from blaspheming the name of their Maker; and such we have in this kingdom. But what are laws of any kind to bind men to their duty, except they are duly executed? No better than ropes of sand. Suppose a man did not believe that there was a God, yet, were he a person of good breeding, who studied a proper decorum of life, he would refrain from swearing for the sake of others in company with him, before whom it might be the greatest rudeness, and even an insult, to debase the character of one whom they esteem their truest and best friend, and to stun their ears with expressions fit to be uttered by none but the most profligate and abandoned of the human race.

The above picture, I own, is gloomy, and so are the times too (which are likely to be soon much better or much worse). I can appeal to any virtuous and unprejudiced man, whether every vice which I have mentioned does not fall under his notice and observation, and often with more heinous aggravations.

And now, to conclude, let me exhort you to leave the issue of wars, and the destiny of nations, to that Being "*who ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he pleaseth.*" He who sets bounds to the "*raging billows of the sea, and changes the storm into a calm,*" can also, in his own appointed time, silence the tumults, and put an end to the violences of men. In the mean time, let us, in obedience to the appointment of this day, humble ourselves in the sight of God, sincerely repent of our sins, and each of us endeavour to cure the evil of our
own

own hearts. Peace is a most invaluable blessing, which I believe every good man sincerely wishes and earnestly prays for; but, if we cannot find it from enemies abroad, let us endeavour to secure to ourselves as large a portion of this blessing at home as we can consistently with truth and a good conscience. Let us behave as peaceable and loyal subjects, by yielding due obedience to the laws of our country; and let us practise the desirable virtues of brotherly love, mutual friendship, and good neighbourhood; and then we may say with the Prophet Hab. iii. 17.—
 “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit
 “be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail,
 “and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off
 “from the fold; and there shall be no herd in the stalls;
 “yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of
 “our salvation.”

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